



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



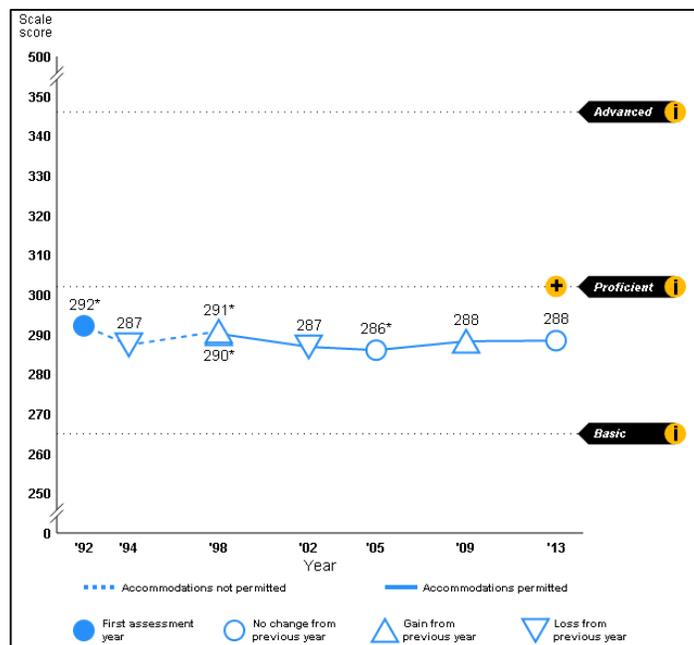
NATION'S REPORT CARD: No Improvements in U.S. High School Seniors' Reading and Math Performance Since 2009; One in Four Students Score "Below Basic" in Reading

Released May 7, findings from the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—also known as the Nation's Report Card—show that average reading and math scores for American high school seniors are unchanged since the last assessment in 2009. Even worse, three-quarters of twelfth graders performed below the proficient level in math and 62 percent performed below that level in reading. The test results come on the heels of new data showing that the national high school graduation rate reached 80 percent for the first time in the nation's history (see "Highest in History" article below).

"Despite the highest high school graduation rate in our history, and despite growth in student achievement over time in elementary school and middle school, student achievement at the high school level has been flat in recent years," said **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan**. "Just as troubling, achievement gaps among ethnic groups have not narrowed. We project that our nation's public schools will become majority-minority this fall—making it even more urgent to put renewed attention into the academic rigor and equity of course offerings and into efforts to redesign high schools. We must reject educational stagnation in our high schools, and as a nation, we must do better for all students, especially for African American and Latino students."

In reading, the average score (288 out of 500) was the same as in 2009, but 2 points higher than in 2005. However, it was also 4 points below the average score from the first year of the test in 1992, as shown in the graph to the right.

Only 38 percent of students performed at or above the proficient level while one in four students fell below the basic level. Among students of color, 36 percent of Hispanic students and 44 percent of black students scored below the basic level, compared to 17 percent of white students and 20 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander students.



In math, the average score (153 out of 300) was the same as the last assessment in 2009, but 3 points higher than in 2005 when the first test was given. Only 26 percent of twelfth graders scored at proficient in math while 35 percent scored below basic. Among students of color, 50 percent of Hispanic students and 62 percent of black students scored below the basic level, compared to 19 percent of Asian/Pacific Islanders and 25 percent of white students.

The combination of the highest high school graduation rate in the nation’s history and gains in average scores at the elementary and middle school levels with stagnant math and reading scores among twelfth graders left education experts offering several reasons for the apparent disconnect.

Some pointed to the ever-increasing diversity in the student testing pool. In 2005, for example, students of color only made up 25 percent of students tested; in 2013, that number grew to 40 percent.

Characteristic	1992	2005	2013
Race/ethnicity			
White	74	67	58
Black	15	13	14
Hispanic	7	14	20
Asian/Pacific Islander	3	5	5
American Indian/Alaska Native	#	1	1

“Our twelfth-grade population is our population. And we don’t explain away test scores based on demographics. But it’s useful to keep in mind that we are seeing increases in subgroups that have traditionally performed lower,” **John Easton, acting commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics and director of the Institute of Education Sciences**, told [The Hechinger Report](#).

Others noted that the higher high school graduation rate meant that lower-performing students who might have dropped out in the past were expanding the pool of test takers. “The good news is that national high school graduation rate is on the upswing and is greater than 80 percent for the first time. Higher graduation rates mean there are more runners on the track—the challenge is getting them up to speed,” [said Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia](#). “However, today’s results reveal that large percentages of the nation’s twelfth graders lack the skills necessary to thrive in the ‘real world’ even though they are on the verge of entering it.”

Wise said the results spoke to the “desperate need for the aggressive implementation of the Common Core State Standards,” which have been adopted in more than forty states. “Higher academic standards must be met with quality education to ensure that all students graduate from high school prepared to succeed in college and a career.”

Complete results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress twelfth-grade reading and mathematics assessments are available at http://nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_g12_2013/#/.



HIGHEST IN HISTORY: U.S. High School Graduation Rate Reaches 80 Percent for the First Time

The national high school graduation rate for the Class of 2012 was 80 percent—the highest in the history of the United States and a 1 percentage point gain over last year. Even with the overall gain, white students continue to graduate from high school at much higher rates than Hispanic, black, and American Indian/Alaska Native students, according to the data released on April 28 by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

“The real-world impact of that improvement for students, their families, and their communities is enormous,” [U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said](#) when he announced the data to the audience at the America’s Promise Alliance Grad Nation Summit. “Because of graduation rate increases between just 2008 and 2012, an additional 100,000 Latino students and an additional 40,000 African American students graduated from high school. That is 140,000 students of color alone with a better chance of getting a good job, owning their own home, and supporting a family. As a country, we owe a debt of gratitude to the teachers, administrators, students and their families whose hard work made that achievement possible.”

Duncan pointed out that the 20 percent of students who did not complete high school on time in 2012 represented more than 700,000 young people—more than the total population of Wyoming or Vermont. He noted that a “sharply disproportionate” share of these individuals are students of color, low-income students, or students with disabilities or limited English proficiency. “Not one of those groups reached a 75 percent graduation rate, let alone 80, and several have rates in the 60s or below,” Duncan said.

Student Subgroup	Graduation Rate
American Indian/Alaska Native	67%
Asian/Pacific Islander	88%
Hispanic	73%
Black	69%
White	86%
Economically Disadvantaged	72%
Limited English Proficiency	59%
Students with Disabilities	61%

Duncan said closing these graduation rate gaps “could not be more important,” especially given that this fall—for the first time in the nation’s history—the majority of public school students will be nonwhite.

“For anyone who has made the mistake of believing that the challenges of black and brown communities are somehow someone else’s problem—a minority problem—that day is over,” Duncan said. “Let us not pretend that all the challenges belong to students who are black, or brown, or poor, or who live in inner-city and rural places. Because when we think about preparing our young people today for the possibilities of tomorrow—which increasingly means preparing them for some form of college—then that’s about all our kids. This is about both equity and excellence. And I believe it’s going to take a sea change in our classrooms to get there.”

Iowa (89 percent) posted the highest graduation rate while the District of Columbia (59 percent) had the lowest. States with the highest and lowest graduation rates are shown in the table below.

States with the Highest and Lowest High School Graduation Rates

State	Graduation Rate	State	Graduation Rate
Iowa	89%	District of Columbia	59%
Nebraska	88%	Nevada	63%
Texas	88%	Oregon	68%
Vermont	88%	Alaska	70%
Wisconsin	88%	Georgia	70%
North Dakota	87%	New Mexico	70%
Tennessee	87%	Louisiana	72%

Of the forty-seven states for which data is available—Idaho, Kentucky, and Oklahoma received an extension and are not currently required to report their adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR)—thirty-seven states improved their graduation rates from 2011 to 2012. Of those states, twenty-five improved their graduation rates by 1 or 2 percentage points while eight states increased their graduation rates by 3 percentage points or more. The largest gains were made by New Mexico (7 percentage points), Missouri (5 percentage points), Florida (4 percentage points), and Utah (4 percentage points).

The graduation rate data is contained in the NCES report *Public High School Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rates and Event Dropout Rates: School Years 2010–11 and 2011–12* and represents the four-year ACGR, which measures of the percentage of students who successfully complete high school in four years and graduate with a regular high school diploma. Students receiving a high school equivalency credential, such as a General Educational Development (GED) credential, certificate of attendance, or any other alternative award, are not considered graduates under the ACGR.

The complete report is available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014391.pdf>.



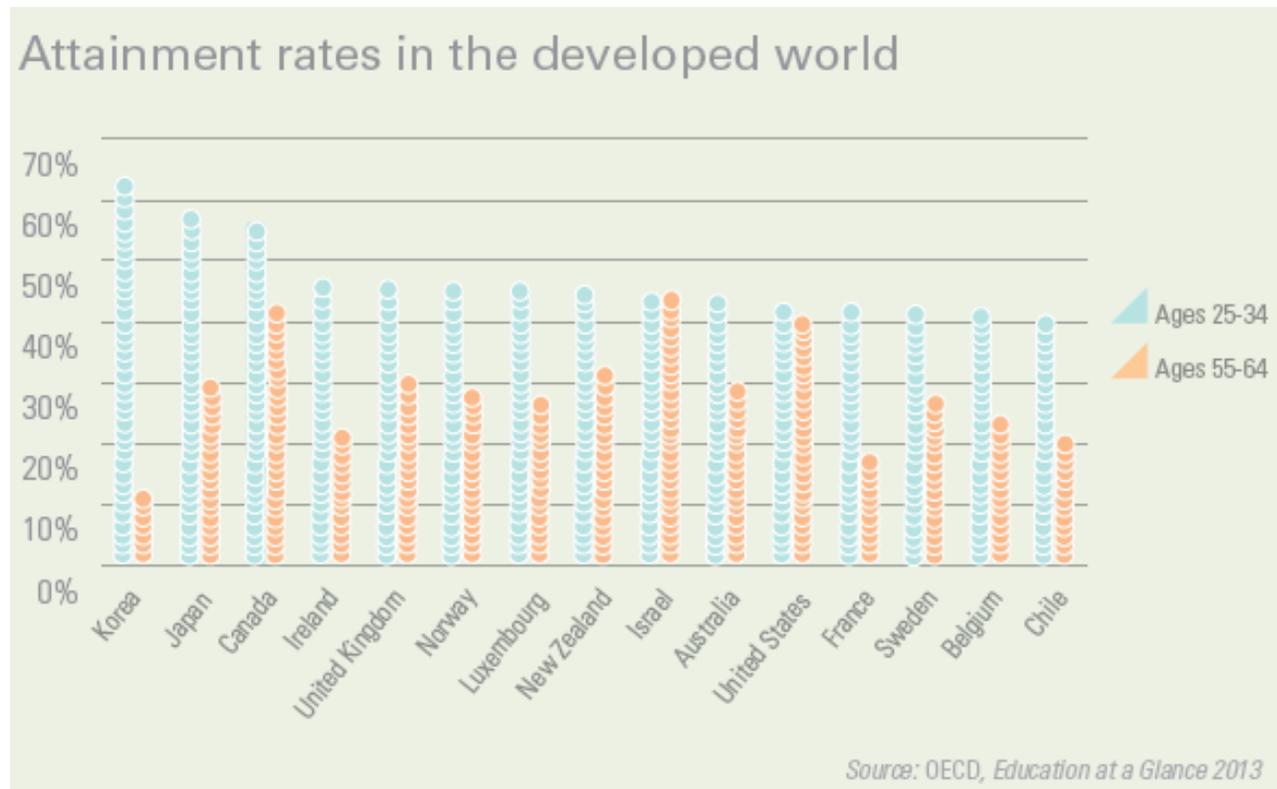
A STRONGER NATION THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION: U.S. College Attainment Increases, but More Work Needed to Reach 60 Percent Goal, Finds New Lumina Foundation Report

In 2012, 39.4 percent of Americans aged twenty-five to sixty-four held a two- or four-year college degree, an increase of 0.7 percentage points from 2011 and the largest year-over-year increase since 2008, according to a new report from the Lumina Foundation. The report, *A Stronger Nation Through Higher Education*, is the fifth in a series tracking the United States’s progress toward the goal that 60 percent of Americans obtain a high-quality postsecondary credential by 2025.

“Momentum is building around increased attainment in America, and we believe that the need—the hunger—for education beyond high school is stronger than ever before,” said **Jamie P. Merisotis, president and chief executive officer of Lumina Foundation**. “Recent student-centered changes in American higher education have made this progress possible. Now, it’s time

to accelerate the system redesign so that we can meet future workforce needs, strengthen our democracy and give all Americans—regardless of race, income, and other socioeconomic factors—the opportunities that postsecondary attainment provides.”

Even with the gains, other countries continue to outpace the United States, the report notes. Based on recent data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) cited in the report, the attainment rate for Americans aged twenty-five to thirty-four (43 percent) is only slightly higher than for Americans aged fifty-five to sixty four (41 percent). Conversely, South Korea has made huge gains among its younger adults to the point where more than 60 percent of individuals aged twenty-five to thirty-four completed education beyond high school, as shown in the graph below. And Canada, where attainment rates for older individuals is roughly equal to that of the United States, is now significantly ahead of the United States based on the attainment rates for younger individuals.



Although the percentage of Americans with a college degree is moving in the right direction, the report sees challenges on the horizon, especially as the U.S. population becomes more diverse. As shown in the image to the right, the percentages of Hispanic, black, American Indian, and Asian and Pacific Islander individuals are projected to grow dramatically by 2025 while the white population is expected to decline by 5.4 percent. Noting that very low percentages of black

	Ages 25-64	Ages 14-51	% Change by 2025
White, non-Hispanic	63.5%	58.9%	Down 5.4%
Black	12.3%	13.2%	Up 9.5%
Hispanic	16.3%	19.4%	Up 21.3%
American Indian	0.7%	0.8%	Up 9.9%
Asian and Pacific Islander	5.8%	5.8%	Up 2.8%

(27.6 percent), Native American (23.4 percent), and Hispanic individuals (19.8 percent) currently hold degrees, the report projects that only about 37.8 percent of working-age Americans will have a college degree in 2025—nearly 1 percentage point lower than the current rate—if attainment rates for racial and ethnic groups do not improve.

The report finds hope in increases in college-going rates among high school students of color. For example, the college-going rate for blacks increased from 62 percent in 2010 to 67.1 percent in 2011 while the rate for Hispanics increased from 57.9 percent to 66.6 percent. At the same time, however, college completion rates among these groups of students trail their white peers. In 2011, the six-year graduation rate for white students was 62 percent, compared to less than 40 percent for black students and 51 percent for Hispanic students. “Increasing completion rates for nonwhite students is absolutely essential to increasing the nation’s higher education attainment rate, just as it is for realizing the promise represented by the increased college enrollment of these students,” the report notes.

To meet the 60 percent goal, the nation’s higher education system will need to assume a more student-centered approach, the report argues. Specifically it must adopt three basic requirements: (1) base postsecondary credentials, including degrees, on learning; (2) create smarter pathways for all students; and (3) make higher education accessible and affordable to all who need it.

The complete report is available at http://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger_nation/.



CORE OF THE MATTER: Alliance for Excellent Education Debuts New Blog Series on Common Core Implementation and Struggling Students

On May 6, the Alliance for Excellent Education launched “Core of the Matter,” a new blog series devoted to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and struggling students. As schools, districts, and states work to implement the new standards—including new assessments—the Alliance will use this series to bring attention to the challenge and imperative of delivering on the promise and potential of the standards for all students, especially those who have been historically underserved by the education system.

The Alliance will publish a new blog post on the first and third Tuesday of every month addressing issues related to implementation of the CCSS. The posts will alternate between those written by Alliance staff and guest bloggers. The [first blog post](#) was written by **Charmaine Mercer, the Alliance’s vice president of policy and advocacy for standards, assessments, and deeper learning.**

On May 20, **Chris Edley, former dean of the University of California-Berkeley School of Law, cochair of the congressionally chartered National Committee on Education Equity and Excellence, and Alliance for Excellent Education board member,** will offer the first guest blog post. Additional guest bloggers will include **Gerry House, president of the Institute for Student Achievement; Linda Darling-Hammond and Kenji Hakuta, renowned professors at Stanford University; Margarita Calderon, professor emerita at Johns Hopkins University; Ahniwake Rose, executive director of the National Indian Education Association,** and many more.

Email the Alliance at equity@all4ed.org to receive an email notification when a new blog post in the series is published. In the meantime, Mercer’s first post on the promise of the CCSS and the areas that need the most attention to ensure that they become a promise kept to historically underserved students is available at <http://all4ed.org/core-of-the-matter-alliance-debuts-new-blog-series-on-common-core-implementation-and-struggling-students/>.



WHAT KIDS ARE READING 2014: New Report Provides List of Most Popular Books Overall and By Gender for Grades 1 Through 12

A new report from Renaissance Reading examines grade-by-grade reading habits of the nation’s students. The report, *What Kids Are Reading: The Book-Reading Habits of Students in American Schools*, includes the top twenty books and the top twenty nonfiction books read overall and by gender for grades one through twelve. It also includes a three-year examination of how exemplars included in the Common Core State Standards have impacted reading trends. The report is based on the reading habits of 9.8 million students from more than 31,000 schools during the 2012–13 school year.

The top-ranked books for each grade level are captured in the chart to the right. Newer books, such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Third Wheel* and *The Hunger Games*, dominate the top of the charts, but several “classics” fall into the top choices, especially in the high school years.

Grade	Top-Ranked Book (Author)
1	<i>Green Eggs and Ham</i> (Dr. Seuss)
2	<i>Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type</i> (Doreen Cronin)
3	<i>Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Third Wheel</i> (Jeff Kinney)
4	<i>Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Third Wheel</i> (Jeff Kinney)
5	<i>Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Third Wheel</i> (Jeff Kinney)
6	<i>Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Third Wheel</i> (Jeff Kinney)
7	<i>The Hunger Games</i> (Suzanne Collins)
8	<i>The Hunger Games</i> (Suzanne Collins)
9	<i>The Hunger Games</i> (Suzanne Collins)
10	<i>The Hunger Games</i> (Suzanne Collins)
11	<i>The Crucible</i> (Arthur Miller)
12	<i>The Hunger Games</i> (Suzanne Collins)

For example, although the three books in the Hunger Games trilogy occupy three of the top six books for grade 9, so do Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*, and William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. And among high school seniors, the three Hunger Games books are joined in the top five by Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*.

The complete report is available at <https://www.renaissance.com/whatkidsarereading>.

Straight A’s: Public Education Policy and Progress is a free biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events in Washington, DC, and around the country. The format makes information on federal education policy accessible to everyone from elected officials and policymakers to parents and community leaders. Contributors include Jason Amos, editor, and Kate Bradley.

The Alliance for Excellent Education is a Washington, DC–based national policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all students, particularly those traditionally underserved, graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship. For more information, visit www.all4ed.org. Follow the Alliance on Twitter (www.twitter.com/all4ed), Facebook (www.facebook.com/all4ed), and the Alliance’s “High School Soup” blog (www.all4ed.org/blog).